

May 14, 2009

TO: Assembly Committee on Agriculture

FROM: Casey Langan, Director, Public Relations

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 236

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation has long supported having agricultural courses as part of local school curriculums. Many of Wisconsin's local agricultural education programs wisely incorporate the concepts of science, math and technology into their curriculums, because there are very few careers in agriculture that don't require competency in these areas. .

Farm Bureau's member-driven policy encourages school districts to revise their agricultural curriculum to a level where the credits for those courses can be utilized as a science credit for the purposes of high school graduation and college admission. Therefore we support legislation, such as Assembly Bill 236, that would provide a clear roadmap for agricultural students, teachers and school boards to follow when seeking science credit for agricultural courses.

Specifically, our member policy also urges the revision of teacher certification requirements to allow for dual certification in agriculture and science for education majors graduating in Wisconsin.

A key component to maintaining a strong agriculture industry and workforce is allowing and encouraging students to receive the appropriate credit for the agricultural courses they choose to enroll in.



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

To: Members, Assembly Committee on Agriculture
From: Michael Bornett, Budget Director and Interim Legislative Liaison *MB*
Date: May 14, 2009
Re: 2009 Assembly Bill 236

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) appreciates the opportunity to comment for information only on 2009 Assembly Bill 236. The bill provides that if a pupil earns at least two credits in science the school board must award the pupil an additional science credit for completing in grades 9 to 12 each course in agriculture that DPI has determined qualifies as science according to criteria established by the department.

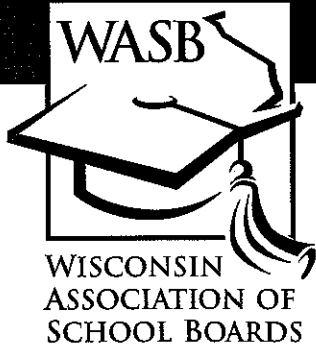
DPI has been committed to expanding opportunities for students to meet the graduation requirements in § 118.33 Stats. and Chapter PI 18, the High School Graduation Standards. Chapter PI 18.02 defines "equivalent graduation policy" as "a board policy which meets the credit requirements specified (§ 118.33 Stats.) for each subject area, but which permits selected equivalent courses as long as such courses contain the time allotment and substantially the same objectives to develop the knowledge, concepts, and skills of the course for which an equivalent is proposed." The high school course equivalency option for a district is not new; however, the process for seeking DPI approval in the area of agriculture and science course equivalency was updated in 2007.

Current law allows a school board to grant science credit for agriculture courses that count toward the two required credits in science for graduation from high school. The department supports this operational flexibility for both students and school boards. However, the department has strong concerns about the provision in AB 236, as drafted, that would require a student to earn at least two credits in science prior to being able to be awarded science credit for an agriculture course. This provision is more restrictive than current law and could deter students from taking science-equivalent agriculture courses. In discussions with staff in the office of the bill's author, it seems that there was no intent to restrict the ability of students to earn these science credits for agriculture courses. If the bill were amended to remove this requirement, the department would withdraw its concern over this provision. If the two credit requirement remains in the bill as it moves forward, the department would oppose the bill.

The bill also says that a school board shall award a pupil additional science credit for each course in agriculture that DPI has determined qualifies as science. While the department fully encourages and endorses the current district-initiated efforts to gain science-equivalency for agriculture courses, it is not current law or DPI policy to require a school board to award the science credit. However, DPI expects that most school districts that go through the effort to gain DPI approval for equivalency will follow through and award the science credit to pupils in their districts that take approved agriculture courses.

In conclusion, the department has concerns with the two science credit requirement in the bill and hopes that the author and committee will move to have that provision removed prior to taking executive action on the bill.

If you have further questions, you may contact me at michael.bornett@dpi.wi.gov or 608-266-2804.



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JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: Assembly Agriculture Committee
FROM: Sheri Krause, Government Relations Specialist
DATE: May 13, 2009
RE: Assembly Bill 236, relating to requiring that certain high school agriculture courses be counted as science credits.

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) has concerns about Assembly Bill 236, relating to requiring that certain high school agriculture courses be counted as science credits.

The WASB strongly supports efforts to allow school boards to grant credit for equivalency courses. Currently, school boards have the option of getting approval from the Department of Public Instruction that an agriculture course is determined to be equivalent to science, and the option of awarding a science credit for that course.

The WASB's concerns with AB 236 are as follows:

- AB 236 mandates that school boards grant science credit to a student who completes an agriculture course deemed equivalent to science. Getting a course deemed as equivalent is an optional process for school districts to undertake. In all likelihood, it would be highly unusual for a school district to undertake this process and then not grant science credit for the course. However, there may be unusual circumstances which warrant this action by a school board. **The WASB respectfully requests an amendment to allow school boards the option of awarding credit if warranted by local circumstances.**
- AB 236 requires students to earn two science credits before being allowed to be granted science credit for an equivalent agriculture course. This is more restrictive than current practice. Currently, school districts are awarding science credit for equivalent courses as part of the high school graduation standards which require two credits in science. **The WASB respectfully request an amendment to allow school districts to grant credit for an equivalent course without requiring that the student first earn two other credits in science.**
- AB 236 would allow a student to receive a science credit for "completing" an equivalent agriculture course. State law and administrative rules typically require students to "earn" a credit. School boards do not want to be in the position of being expected to grant credit for a course that a student completes, but does not pass. **The WASB respectfully requests an amendment to ensure that the student must "earn" the credit.**